

Georgia Congressman argues before the House Rules Committee

Washington, D.C. Today, Congressman Sanford Bishop will argue for the inclusion of his "Healthy Troops" Act, as an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill (H.R. 5122). Introduced last as H.R. 4346 in the 108th Congress, the Healthy Troops amendment clarifies Congress' 1997 mandate (PL 105-85, 10 U.S.C. § 1074f) that DoD provide full hands-on pre- and post- deployment medical exams for all deployed troops, as opposed to the self-administered questionnaires that are currently distributed to troops pursuant to DoD protocol, in violation of Congress' clear mandate, and current law.

The Healthy Troops language is supported by The Military Coalition and the 35 Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) which the Coalition represents, including: Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW); American Veterans (AMVETS); Disabled American Veterans (DAV); Blinded Veterans Association (BVA); among many others.

"If members of the Rules Committee are as I am, they have thousands of open veterans claims in our district offices – many of which are attributable to the a lack of information, at the pre- and post- deployment stages, establishing a health "baseline," so the VA can determine whether ailments are the result of a pre-existing conditions, or are in-fact service-connected disabilities" stated Congressman Bishop. "My amendment would significantly close that gap by mandating that real medical personnel administer medical exams, as opposed to the troops themselves. The result would be less backlog, and greater military efficiency by only deploying troops that are medically suitable for combat service" Bishop continued, "I implore the Rules Committee to exercise reasoned and compassionate judgment, to make this amendment in order."

The 1997 law was passed after many veterans of Operation Desert Storm were denied disability claims for what has become known as "Gulf War Syndrome." Without pre- and post-war documentation it was impossible for veterans of the first Gulf War to prove that their deployment had in fact caused their symptoms. Without verification that symptoms are war-related, claims for medical compensation are denied.

If the Rules Committee approves Congressman Bishop's request, the Healthy Troops Amendment will move to the House floor for a vote on its inclusion in H.R. 5122.